

The Albany HERALD

By J.D. Sumner
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ALBANY - Close to 500 people packed an Albany State University auditorium Thursday as U.S. Rep. Sanford Bishop, D-Albany, addressed his constituents on controversial health reform ideas.

After his stop in Bainbridge earlier in the day ran over two hours to accommodate questions, Bishop greeted the standing-room-only crowd at ASU with information about the house bill currently in Congress.

"I believe that we have a moral obligation that all Americans receive the health care they need to live successful, fulfilling lives," Bishop said.

With tight security - those entering into the auditorium had to be checked by ASU police and Dougherty County Sheriff's deputies - few outbursts got out of hand.

Deborah Swindle, a Dooly County resident who said during last week's protest in front of Bishop's Albany office that the Obama Administration was just trying to get their "foot in the door" to socialism, asked Bishop if there was any provision that would make him vote down the measure, after mentioning illegal immigrants being able to receive emergency medical care under the proposal.

"You said that it doesn't cover illegal immigrants...what you didn't say is that it does cover their children, what you didn't say is that this bill doesn't stop illegal immigrants from going to the emergency room and getting emergency treatment," she said.

Later in the meeting Swindle, after having been warned about repeated outbursts, was seen leaving the auditorium with ASU police officer in tow.

Rhonda M. Moorman, a doctor who works in Calhoun County, told Bishop she was concerned that the bill would force small, rural health care centers into closing and that a chronic lack of doctors would leave portions of the country without medical help.

Both were issues Bishop emphasized would not occur because rural health care and primary care was a centerpiece of the legislative priority of the Obama administration.

While outbursts and yelling from the crowd occurred, the event remained mostly civil without the

personal attacks witnessed in other parts of the country.

Daniel Simmons, a minister, told Bishop that in his church-run health clinic for the poor and uninsured, the demand is so high that people are waiting until next June for certain procedures.

"We've heard the opposition, but can we count on you to stand up for those who can't speak for themselves?" Simmons asked. "I'd rather pay \$1 for someone who is sick than for a war we never should've been in," he said to rousing applause.

It was the second stop on Thursday for Bishop, who, according to members of his staff, encountered a "lively" crowd in Bainbridge Thursday morning.

Local attorney Jim Finkelstein earned applause after he suggested that the congressman consider adding a provision that requires doctors and hospitals to post their fees for procedures in an effort to drive prices down.

Topics on how the bill deals with illegal immigration and how the legislation will be paid for, dominated the discussion.

Bishop and the other members of the Blue Dog Coalition managed to slow the bill through the House after many in the country complained the health care overhaul was just too much, too fast.

They also managed to convince leadership in the House to add provisions to the bill to insure it would be deficit neutral and would not contribute to controversial issues like state-funded abortions.

Running more than an hour and half past the announced end, Bishop thanked those who attended for being involved in the process and pledged to take their cares and concerns back with him to Washington with one caveat:

"My mind is made up on health care reform," he told the crowd. "The size and scope and details are what I must consider and what I have not decided upon."